

Discrimination and Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs) in the Lives of Child Refugees of the 1930s: Learning for the Present and the Future

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Introduction

This ACEs report investigates specific ACEs such as racism, anti-Semitism and xenophobia experienced by child refugees who fled for safety from the threats of National Socialism (Nazism) in Central Europe in the 1930s and who sought sanctuary in the UK.

A longitudinal methodology was used to investigate the experiences of racism and discrimination remembered decades later.

The report suggests and proposes ways...

- To minimize exclusion based on race, religion, and refugee status.
- To improve inclusion and acceptance of these individuals forced to migrate on an urgent basis.



Historical Background

January 1933

Adolf Hitler and the Nazi Party assumed power in Germany. Accumulating antisemitic and other discriminatory policies resulted in the flight and forced migration of tens of thousands, resulting in a European refugee crisis

November 1938

The British government agreed to allow an unlimited number of unaccompanied children under the age of 17 into the country on a temporary basis which resulted in a movement of children now called the Kindertransport.

Pre-migration discrimination

Common faced Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs)

- Discriminatory violence toward themselves.
- Witnessing others being attacked.
- Dislocation and loss of home.
- Loss of friends.
- End of education.
- Deprivation of basic needs.

Post-migration discrimination

Anti-semitism

- Anti-semitism was the main type of racial prejudice child refugees experienced but it was not overly prevalent in their reflections on their post-migration experiences.
- Several accounts mentioned how offensive remarks were made in passing and the child refugees themselves appeared to brush off these comments, calling them trivial or 'silly'.

Anti-Foreign

- Anti-foreign discrimination and abuse was not uncommon in school settings. Other children saw the refugee first and foremost as German speaking without fully understanding what had caused them to flee or the fact that they might not identify as German.
- Children were forced or encouraged to change their name to something less German or less foreign as an effort to remove or dismiss the culture and ethnic persona of the child.

Anti-Refugee

- This type of discrimination was most remembered. It's a form of othering which is likely to have been felt more potently in everyday life.
- Child refugees were particularly sensitive about their refugee status with one reporting they preferred to hide their identity and remain a 'closet refugee'.

Learning for the present and future

Preparation in all settings is key

Adults and children in schools, foster families and communities need to be prepared for the political and social complexity of the child refugee's background, experiences in their originating countries and experiences of flight and forced migration.

Education around racism and discrimination is necessary

Adults and children must be made aware of how to avoid discrimination, bullying behaviour and verbal abuse.

Racist and discriminatory language must be called out and examined, and the ignorance or deep-seated prejudices fuelling these racial slurs needs addressing on micro, meso, and macro levels of our society.

Cultural, religious, and linguistic experiences must be respected

The placement of child refugees must be carefully considered

There should be a careful vetting of carers approved carers should be given detailed information about the refugee's country of origin, culture, and their possible adverse pre-migration experiences.

Refugee organisations should ensure there is some sort of local community consisting of other refugees or people who originated from the same country, who speak the same language, or who practise the same religion.

